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Teaching sentential intonation through Proverbs

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Abstract

Suprasegmental elements such as *stress*, *pitch*, *juncture* and *linkers* are language universals that are uttered naturally in the mother tongue without prior training but need to be learned systematically in the target language. Among other techniques of *sentential pronunciation teaching* to second language (L2) students, exercises with proverbs in the target language can be utilized effectively to acquire natural rhythm and articulation. By addressing a natural interest in traditional wisdom and common sense, proverbs in the target language benefit students with their grammatical and lexical importance and can be used to produce acceptable pronunciation and intonation in the new language. Going that one step further from word stress to sentential intonation by working on broad transcriptions, pronunciation teachers may produce a crystal pronunciation contributing to better communication.

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1. Introduction

Proverbs in the target language may be excellent resource materials for teaching pronunciation, stress and especially ‘sentence intonation’ along with their many other uses in the field of ELT. The broad transcriptions of some English proverbs in IPA symbols, featuring primary and secondary stress, pitch and juncture characteristics with relevant signs, leaving unstressed syllable unmarked and clearly pointing out linkers, can be effectively used to teach applied phonetics and phonology to Turkish learners of English.

2. Importance of Sentential Intonation

The teaching of pronunciation and intonation has never been totally successful. The reason why many earlier practices of sentential pronunciation training (mainly consisting of only marking the prominent stresses on certain syllables such as “an ápple a day keeps the dóctor away”) have failed to improve students’ pronunciation of full sentences (in varying stress, intonation, pitch and juncture) is because the method used lacked the essential details and clarity which broad transcription offers when combined with all relevant elements. Thus, students fall short in their effective communication and meaning-conveying performances because they ignore and neglect to grasp how segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation are combined.

3. Background of Sentential Intonation Showing

In this presentation, the essential elements of suprasegmental pronunciation [i.e. pitch, stress, and juncture, as well as intonation universals such as the correlation between the signifiers and those signified by primary and secondary stress and the linking process] will be explored thoroughly by using some popular English proverbs. In a bid to address the attention of the large Spanish speaking audience at the conference some well known Spanish proverbs will also be added to the list to set a model of pronunciation teaching to Spanish learners in Turkey, which is a fast-

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growing trend in our country. Thus, for example, Turkish learners of Spanish will be able to quote Cervantes more effectively to delight Spanish ears with their crystal clear articulation: “Dime con quién andas, y te diré quién eres.” (Tell me who you hang around with, and I'll tell you who you are.) Participants in the presentation will acquire this expertise in IPA broad transcription supported by all other suprasegmental features.

4. Examining English and Spanish Proverbs in Regard to their Suprasegmental Structure:

In terms of methodology, a sample of English proverbs followed by some Spanish proverbs [listed below] will be presented to the audience (as time permits) with their IPA phonemic broad transcriptions featuring their clearly-marked suprasegmental characteristics. This will be carried out in an interactive manner, convincing the audience of the effectiveness in this innovative approach.

IPA TRANSCRIPTION & Audio: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5S8OUJpy_s

DAW STEINBERG CUBASE6 Graphics: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LQXECMa2Pk>

5. Suprasegmental Notions and How They are Marked on the Broad Transcription:

Suprasegmental features of a language are the phenomena that extend beyond a single sound segment. These are considered to be pitch, stress and juncture which collectively form intonation. [RIDGEWAY 1999:1] If such features are not used, we humans sound like robots, lacking the concise way in which meaning is conveyed [LEHISTE 1991:98]. The elements of *intonation*, namely *juncture* and *pitch*, help the break the stream of sound into manageable groups and give additional clues to meaning by either highlighting particular syllables further or assisting the comprehension of the grammatical or pragmatic function. [CLARK and YALLOP 1990:276] Suprasegmental features are language universals with their own particularities. The correct use of intonation is an essential feature of communicative competence, and erroneous intonation leads to communication breakdown [GUTNECHT 1978:59-260].

Although many teachers consider the pronunciation of individual phonemes as of utmost importance, some of them lack emphasis on the *prosodic elements*. [CUTLER et. al 1997:141] In connected speech, some particular elements of *linking*, *assimilation* and *deletion* are essential to make understanding easier for the hearer. [RIDGEWAY 1999:43] *Linking* is a method of connecting the last sound of one syllable to the first sound of the next such as “left_eye” or “the_apples”. In *assimilation*, which is another universal feature of spoken language, [CELCE-MURCIA et. al. 1996:159] one sound adapts to the characteristics of a neighbouring sound such as “good+book” and “would+you”. *Deletion* appears in the form of elision and aphesis in RP. We can see this in such examples as “West_Central Anatolia” and “choc_olate” where elision occurs, and aphesis occurs with the omission of initial *e* in “excuse me”.

Juncture is the suprasegmental feature that indicates the borders of words and groups of words in speech. The Prague school referred to such elements as boundary signals, neatly summarising their role. *Juncture* is a sound quality signaling a pause or pauses. Junctures are defined as “perceptible differences in word segmentation” [CELCE-MURCIA, ET AL: 241]. LIEBERMAN [1967:187-8] mentions that BLOCH and TRAGER [1942] first introduced the *plus juncture* and *open internal juncture* to indicate a word boundary, and that later TRAGER and SMITH [1951] added three varieties of juncture to describe pauses in speech accompanied particular pitch changes.

Pause junctures are characterized by CALVERT [1986:170] as the intervals between words and phrases or clauses shown as commas and colons or semicolons indicating shorter or longer pauses. DEMIREZEN [1986:116, 2009:4] points out that punctuation marks do give out indications of which junctures should be used for which punctuation mark, namely falling juncture sign [↓] corresponding to (.), rising juncture sign [↑] corresponding to (?) and sustained juncture sign [⇒] or [⇒⇒] to (, ; : ...).

By *word stress* or *accent* what is meant is a “greater loudness, change of pitch or greater syllable length”. [RIDGEWAY 1999:83] A distinction here between word stresses, compound word stresses and sentence stresses must be clearly stated because the combination of various levels of stresses, such as primary, secondary, tertiary etc., presents special features in sentence intonation where they are expected to coexist harmoniously. For most nouns in

English, the stressed syllable appears at the initial position; verbs tend to have their prominent stressed syllables toward the end. In connected speech, *secondary stress* may occur several times within the intonation unit, both before and after the tonic. [RIDGEWAY 1999:112] As for pitch, it is this element that brings the music to intonation. [RIDGEWAY 1999:134]

CELCE-MURCIA et.al. [1996:184] explain that normal conversation moves between middle and high pitch, with low pitch typically signaling the end of an utterance. The extra high level is generally used to express a strong emotion such as surprise, great enthusiasm or disbelief, and is the pitch level often used in contrastive or emphatic stress. Pitch is the most complex of the suprasegmental elements to apply to utterances, as there are a number of different patterns to consider as well as the relationship between different types of clauses and punctuation. [RIDGEWAY 1999:154]

6 Showing Suprasegmental Elements of one English and one Spanish Proverb on their Broad Transcription

In the following two famous proverbs, the first being an English proverb and the second a Spanish one, detailed suprasegmental features are shown. Primary Stress ['] has been shown for prominence or the identifying factor, Secondary Stress [,] for the identified factor, linking [ˌ] to link the final phoneme of the preceding word to the initial phoneme of the following item, the Falling Juncture [↓] to pinpoint the end utterance, the Rising Juncture [↑] to show the question utterance and the Pause Juncture to show a sustained terminal juncture or a level juncture [⇒]. The Repetitive Juncture sign [⇒⇒] has been used to show the longer period of pause between utterances. Here are the examples:

A TWIG MUST BE BENT WHILE IT'S GREEN.

[ə ˌtwɪɡ ⇒ ˈmʌst bi ˌbent ⇒⇒ ˌwaɪl ɪts ˈɡriːn. ↓]

[In the former part of the sentence “twig” is separated from the sentence by a short pause juncture; the group “must be is bent” preserved in tact, the primary stress on “must” is in the defining position for and “bent” to define it, and between the first and the second part of the sentence there is sustained juncture. “While” and “it’s” portions in the latter part of the sentence are connected with a linker where “green” is defining and “while” defined, thus correlating with one another though reverse order compared to the former part of the sentence; the final falling juncture indicates the ending of the sentence.]

Tell me which whom you hang around, I'll tell you who you are.
DIME CON QUIÉN ANDAS, Y TE DIRÉ QUIÉN ERES.
 [ˈdime ⇒ ˌkon ˈkjen ˌan ˌdas ⇒⇒ ˌi te dɪ ˈre ⇒ ˈkjen ˌe ˌres. ↓]

[In the former part of the sentence broken with comma [therefore a double juncture] we have a short break after “dime” with a first syllable stress, then a triple stress combination dominated by “quién” prominence leaving the two neighboring words “con” and “andas” in the secondary position with a linker between last consonant of “kjen” and the first vowel of “andas”; the second part of the sentence is broken into two parts with a short pause juncture after “diré”. “y” falls into secondary stress yielding to the strong “re” final prominent syllable of “diré”. Linkage is here between “kjen” and “eres” where “quién”’s primary prominence reduces the stressed last syllable of “eres” into secondary level. The sentence ends with a falling juncture to stop the utterance.]

7. Some Other English Proverbs with their Suprasegmental Features

- 1 [ə ˌtwɪɡ ⇒ ˈmʌst bi ˌbent ⇒⇒ ˌwaɪl ɪts ˈɡriːn. ↓]
- 2 [ˈwɪmɪn ⇒ ˈmʌst ˌhæv ⇒ ˌðeːə ˈwɪlz ⇒⇒ ˌwaɪl ˌðeːɪ ˈlɪv ⇒ bɪ ˌkɒz ˌðeɪ ˌmeɪk ˈnʌn ⇒ ˌwɛn ˌðeɪ ˈdaɪ. ↓]
- 3 [jʊ ˌaː ⇒ ˈnevə ˌtuː ˌoʊld ⇒ tə ˈlɪzən. ↓]
- 4 [ə ˈbʌd ˌɪn ˌðə ˌhænd ⇒ ɪz ˌwɜːθ ⇒ ˌtuː ˌɪn ˌðə ˌbʊf. ↓]
- 5 [ə ˈfuː ˌmeɪ ˌaːsk ⇒ ˌmɔːə ˌkwɛstʃən ˌɪn ˌə ˌn ˌaːrə ⇒ ˌðæn ˌə ˌwaɪz ˌmæn ˌkən ˌaːnsə ⇒ ˌr ˌɪn ˌsevən ˌjɪz. ↓]
- 6 [ˈhi ⇒ hʊ ˌwʊd ˌðə ˌdɔːtə ˌwɪn ⇒ ˌmʌst ˌwɪθ ˌðə ˌmʌðə ⇒ ˌfæst ˌbɪ ˌɡɪn. ↓]
- 7 [ə ˌwʊmən ⇒ ˌmoʊst ˌpʊtənt ˌwɛpən ⇒ ɪz ˌhə ˌtʌŋ ˌə ˌæn ˌfɪː ˌnevə ˌlets ˌɪt ⇒ ˌrʌst. ↓]

- 8 [ðə 'pleʒə ⇒ r_əv wɒt wi: ɪn'dʒɔ:ɪ ⇒ ɪz lɒst ⇒ ⇒ ba:ɪ 'kʌvətɪŋ mɔ:ə. ↓]
 9 [jə 'sʌn_ɪz jə 'sʌn ⇒ tɪl hi 'geɪts hɪmself ə 'waɪf. ⇒ ⇒ jə 'dɔ:tə r_ɪz jə 'dɔ:tə ⇒ θu: aʊt hə 'laɪf. ↓]
 10 [jə 'meɪn 'lɪd ə 'hɔ:s ⇒ tʊ ðə 'wɔ:tə, ⇒ ⇒ bʌt jə 'kænət 'meɪk hɪm ⇒

8. And Some Spanish Proverbs to be Used as Examples

- 1 [a kaba, lo regala'do ⇒ ⇒ 'no le mires ⇒ los 'dientes. ↓] **A caballo regalado no le mires los dientes.** (Do not check a horse given as a present.)
- 2 [Al 'bwen_entende, dor, ⇒ 'pokas pa, labras ba'stan. ↓] **Al buen entendedor pocas palabras bastan.** (A good listener needs few words.)
- 3 [ar'bol ke na, θe tor'θido, ⇒ ja'mas su tronko ende'reθa. ↓] **Árbol que nace torcido, jamás su tronco endereza.** (A tree that is born twisted never grows straight.)
- 4 [a, 'kjen madru'ya, ⇒ ,djos leaju'da. ↓] **A quien madruga, Dios le ayuda.** (God helps those who get up early.)
- 5 [bar'riya le, na, cora'θon con, tento. ↓] **Barriga llena, corazón contento.** (Full stomach, happy heart.)
- 6 ['krja cuer, vos ⇒ ,ɪ te saka'ran los_oxos. ↓] **Cría cuervos ⇒ y te sacarán los ojos.** (Raise crows and they will peck your eyes out.)
- 7 [del di'tfo al_e,tfo ⇒ ,ay_un 'mʊtfo ,bwen 'tretfo. ↓] **Del dicho al hecho hay un mucho buen trecho.** (Between word and deed, there's a wide trench.)
- 8 [,es mas fa'θil ⇒ ,βer la pa'xa_en ⇒ ,oxo_ 'axeno ⇒ ⇒ ,ke la βi'ya ⇒ ,en_el 'propjo. ↓] **Es más fá'cil ver la paja en ojo ajeno que la viga en el propio.** (It's easier to see the straw in someone else than the beam in oneself.)
- 9 ['no de,xes ⇒ pa,ra ma'ñana ⇒ ⇒ 'lo ke ,pwedas ⇒ ,aθer_ 'oy. ↓] **No dejes para mañana lo que puedas hacer hoy.** (Don't wait for tomorrow to do something you can do today.)
- 10 ['mas βa,le ⇒ pa'xaro en ma,no ⇒ ke ,θjentos vo'lando. ↓] **Más vale pájaro en mano que cientos volando.** (A bird in the hand is better than a hundred flying birds.)
- 11 [,si tu mu'xer ⇒ ,kjere ti'rarte ⇒ ,de_un te'xado, ⇒ ⇒ pro'kura ke ,sea ⇒ uno ba,xo, mayor'mente. ↓] **Si tu mujer quiere tirarte de un tejado, procura que sea uno bajo, mayormente.** (If your wife wants to throw you off the roof, make sure the roof is as low as possible)

6. Conclusion:

Proverbs, reflecting the traditional richness of any culture in universal vein, are also valuable materials in the teaching of the lexical, grammatical and phonetic elements of the target language. Features of oral communication such as clear articulation and intonation are essential elements of language students' skill in getting their meaning across efficiently in the L2 environment. Therefore, proverbs must be taught more often by pronunciation teachers to give them this skill while dealing with the target language's phonetics and speech rhythm, technically speaking "the segmental and suprasegmental" structure (Can, 145: 2011). Students who are able to use L2 proverbs to the point in their utterances always feel more confident and at home with the culture of the natives they are associated with. As they quote such proverbs they not only demonstrate their skill to communicate with them, they also appeal to the same universal values cherished by everyone involved as human beings. Identifying one another with all those around us as common citizens of this vast yet small world we coexist peacefully by loving and understanding one another, under the same roof in the same eternal wisdom. What is "efficient language teaching" for then if not serving this cause of universal communication in love and understanding?

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